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ABSTRACT

This research provides information for improving organizational skills in writing through the use of graphic organizers. The targeted population consisted of second, third and fifth grade students in a suburban community. Evidence for the existence of this problem included anecdotal records, teacher observations, student surveys, and assessments that indicated the level of student academic performance. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that the problem related to inconsistency of teaching methods used in writing instruction among teachers. Lack of student motivation was evident. Furthermore, conflicting standards and guidelines for grading writing exercises posed a problem in schools. A review of solution strategies suggested by researchers, combined with the analysis of the problem, offered assistance in creative writing, vocabulary development, portfolios, instructional approaches, and graphic organizers. Post-intervention data indicated an improvement in the use of organizational skills during the writing process. Students had growth in the area of transferring these skills into other subject areas. The researchers recommended more emphasis on teaching grammar and usage, as well as students editing their writing. Contains 27 references and 7 tables of data. Appendixes contain a writing observation checklist; parent, teacher, and student writing surveys; and writing rubrics for each grade level. (Author/RS)

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IMPROVING ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

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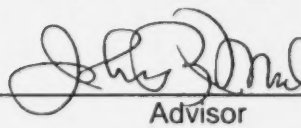

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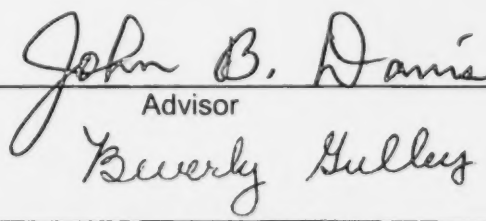

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students in the targeted second, third and fifth grade classes in a suburban community demonstrated a lack of organizational skills that interfered with their academic growth. Evidence for the existence of this problem included anecdotal records, teacher observations, student surveys, and assessments that indicated the level of student academic performance.

Immediate Problem Context

School A had 440 students enrolled. The racial and ethnic background consisted of 90% White, 1% Black, 9% Hispanic, and 1% Asian and Pacific Islander. About 4% of the students came from low-income families. The attendance rate for School A was 96% with a mobility rate of 9%.

School A was a Kindergarten through sixth grade building. The average class size consisted of 24 students. There were 32 full-time and 3 part-time teachers in the building. The average teaching experience was 13 years, and

31% of teachers had master's degrees. The school included 3 aides and 4 support staff. Some special programs included Reading Recovery, Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.), Stranger Danger, Science Center, Drop Everything and Read (D.E.A.R.), Conflict Resolution, Accelerated Reader, and George Williams Outdoor Education. Some extra-curricular activities included French Club, Yearbook Club, Computer Club, Social Studies Activity Hour, chorus, patrol, and student council. School A had a traditional curriculum which included language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, health, physical education, and fine arts. The average operating expenditure per pupil was about $5,900.

School B had 550 students enrolled. The racial and ethnical background consisted of 78% White, 15% Black, 5% Hispanic, and 3% Asian. Although the district population was made up of a wide range of socio-economic levels, for the most part it was a middle class, suburban community. About 22% of the families were low-income. The attendance rate for School B was 96%, and the mobility rate was 17%.

School B was a second through fifth grade building. The average class consisted of 25 students. There were 37 full-time and 6 part-time teachers in the building. The average years of teaching experience for teachers was 17 years, and 49% of teachers had master's degrees. The school included 6 aides and 6 support staff. Some special programs included D.A.R.E., Title I, English as a Second Language (ESL), Explorations, Teacher Assistance Team (TAT),

Accelerated Reader, Outdoor Education program, Peer Mediation, and Student's Quiet Uninterrupted Reading Time (SQUIRT). Some extra-curricular activities included after school physical education, basketball, volleyball, safety monitors, safety patrols, Video Club, Garden Club, Sing for Fun Club, chorus, and student council.

School B had a traditional curriculum which included language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, health, physical education, and fine arts. The operating expenditure per pupil was about $6,300.

The Surrounding Community

The schools were located in a suburban community with a population of 57,000. The median age was 34 with an ethnic mix of 92% White, 4% Black, and 4% Hispanic. This community started as an agricultural area and developed into a prosperous residential area. Families in this community had a median income of $26,000, and the unemployment rate was 3.3%. The types of employment in the community were technical sales, service, precision production, laborers, and managers.

Opportunities for continuing education consisted of a four-year university and a two-year community college. The residents gratefully acknowledged the contributions made by the police and fire departments. A hospital, visiting nurses, and the county health department met the community's medical needs. The community's entertainment and cultural needs were met through parks, libraries,

athletic and recreation centers, golf courses, restaurants, shopping malls, and theatrical and musical events.

School District A had six buildings, which enrolled students in grades Kindergarten through eighth, with a total enrollment of 2,700 students. The district had five elementary schools and a junior high school. The ethnic mix of students was 91% White, .7% Black, 6% Hispanic, 1.8% Asian and Pacific Islander, and .3% Native American. The district had a 17:1 ratio of students to teachers. The Science Environmental Center opened in the fall of 1992 to provide a component to the district's science curriculum.

There was a total of 180 certified staff members working in the district. The ethnicity of staff was 99.4% White and .6% Asian and Pacific Islander. The average salaries for teachers and administrators were $39,000 and $85,000, respectively.

School District B had four buildings, which enrolled students in grades Kindergarten through eighth, with a total enrollment of 2,600 students. The district had two second and fifth grade buildings, a primary center, and a junior high school. The ethnic mix of students was 86% White, 6.4% Black, 5.6% Hispanic, 1.8% Asian and 0.2% Native American. The district had a 21:1 ratio of students to teachers.

There were a total of 160 certified staff members working in the district. The ethnicity of staff was 99.3% White and 0.7% Native American. The average salaries for teachers and administrators were $45,000 and $79,000, respectively.

Issues affecting the school district and community included the lack of technology, low achievement test scores, and lack of space.

National Context of the Problem

How to teach children to use organizational skills for effective writing has been an area of debate and concern for decades. It is a question that continues to arise, and no definitive answer has been provided. The typical American student has not manifested appropriate writing skills. Instead, students exhibit only partial mastery of writing techniques (Nation's Report Card, 1999). Educators are concerned about students' lack of background knowledge in the area of writing.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress has conducted periodic tests on the writing skills of students since 1972. About 160,000 students from the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades have been assessed at the state and national levels.

The findings indicate that three-fourths of students achieve at the basic level. The basic achievement level implies partial mastery of writing skills required for proficiency. Approximately one-fourth of the students perform at the proficient level. Proficient achievement suggests a solid performance and mastery over difficult subject matter. According to the advanced criteria, only one percent qualified. Students at the advanced level exhibit exceptional performance (Greenwald, Persky, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999). The results indicate a need to increase academic performance of students in writing.

There are a variety of influences which enable students to learn. Children's school and home environment can hinder their academic and future success. Students are influenced by parents and others in the home. Upon entering school, their level of interest is sparked and heavily influenced by teachers, administrators, and their classmates (Brewster & Fager, 2000). If parents and teachers promote a high standard of excellence, many students may exhibit a higher level of success.

Once teachers have provided a basic model of instruction, students must be held accountable for their writing. According to Routman and Maxim (1996), teachers should require high expectations for quality and quantity. While the quantity of writing is important, it does not lead to quality without some teacher input. Students who develop the ability to produce quality writing with assistance from instructors are more likely to prosper significantly.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the problem of students lacking organizational skills in academics, various types of data were accumulated. Evidence was obtained through observation checklists, students' surveys, anecdotal records which included note- taking and reflections, and writing rubrics. The data collected are presented in the following tables.

Table 1

Percentage of Teachers Receiving Preservices or Inservices on Writing.

Question	Yes	No
Trained Effectively	70	30
Attended Writing Workshop	78	22

n = 69

Tables 1 through 3 show the results of the teacher writing survey. In Table 1, of the 69 teachers surveyed, 70% felt they were effectively trained to teach writing. Seventy-eight percent of teachers had attended a writing class or workshop.

Table 2

Percentage of Teachers' Input on Student Writing Skills.

Question	High	Average	Low
Description of Students' Writing Habits	1	72	27

n = 69

Table 2 describes the writing habits of students. Teachers observed that 72% of their students were average and 27% were low achievers in the area of writing.

Table 3

Percentage of Teachers' Involvement with Graphic Organizers.

Question	Always	Sometimes	Never
Use of Graphic Organizers	26	65	9

n = 69

Table 3 displays the number of teachers that incorporated graphic organizers into their lessons when teaching writing. Twenty-six percent of teachers always used graphic organizers, while 65% sometimes found them helpful to students.

Table 4

Percentage of Responses for Parent Writing Interest Survey.

Question	Always	Sometimes	Never
Parents' Writing Interest	13	74	13
Writing Encouragement	63	30	7
Students' Writing Interest	26	69	5
Students' Expression with Journals	5	45	50
Discussion on Writing	35	54	11
Assistance with Child's Writing	59	29	12

n = 64

Table 4 displays the results of the parent writing interest survey. Parents were asked to give their thoughts on writing as well as to describe their childrens' interest in writing outside of school. Only 13% of the parents surveyed had a strong interest in writing, while 74% were sometimes interested. Ninety-five percent of children indicated that they did not write regularly in journals.

Table 5

Percentages of Student Responses on Writing.

Question	Yes	Not Sure	No
Enjoy Writing	68	19	13
Choice of Topic	85	10	5
Writing Partner	46	22	32
Share Writing in Class	40	34	26
Writing Difficulty	60	34	6
Comprehension of Graphic Organizers	13	40	47
Graphic Organizers are Helpful	18	65	17
Proofread Writing	18	25	57

n = 65

Table 5 indicates the results of the student writing survey. The data revealed that 60% of the students found writing difficult. Eighty-seven percent apparently did not comprehend the role of graphic organizers in writing. Eighty-two percent did not see the benefits of graphic organizers. Only 18% of the children surveyed edited their assignments upon completion.

Based on the surveys given, sufficient evidence was found to implement graphic organizers into the classroom. Educators found that students' writing skills were low to average and in need of extra assistance. Students demonstrated a lack of organizational skills in writing and found writing difficult. Together, this hindered student achievement in writing.

Probable Causes

Numerous reasons may contribute to the problem of students' failure to use organizational skills in writing. Upon analyzing the local context there were indications that the problem was related to inconsistency of teaching methods used in writing instruction among teachers, lack of student motivation to complete writing assignments, and conflicting standards and guidelines for grading writing exercises in the schools.

Inconsistency among instructors was a big concern for the teachers. Educators set their own expectations for the development of written work. This may have been due to a lack of knowledge for new curriculum guidelines. Teachers were rarely given the opportunity for collaboration and outside assistance. The result was often low academic scores in the area of writing.

As teachers struggle to present a variety of techniques on writing skills, the interest of many students may falter. Students need intriguing essay prompts that emphasize areas of personal relevance. Students lack motivation when teachers do not provide creative prompts, which may cause students to produce work of lesser quality.

State testing mandates also have implications for teachers and students. Guidelines and standards on paragraph formats and grading rubrics are often altered on a yearly basis. As a result, frustration may occur at all levels.

Literature suggested several causes for the lack of writing skills among students. According to Five and Dionisio (1998), many teachers fail to teach

writing skills in a meaning-centered approach; instead many teachers focus on individual uses of grammar. Students often lack the ability to implement a variety of skills during the writing process. Instead they choose to be very basic and vague.

A majority of elementary-age children demonstrate poorly constructed essays because their focus is on the quantity of words rather than the quality of writing. While quantity of writing is important, it does not lead to quality without some teacher intervention (Routman & Maxim, 1996). Once these suggestions have been implemented, students should be held accountable for producing quality work.

Greenwald et al. (1999) identified home factors that correlated with levels of written performance. One factor was the lack of parental involvement in children's studies. Because many parents are involved in a variety of daily responsibilities, they often neglect assisting their children with homework.

Another factor involved children who spoke a second language at home. Teachers may recognize a bilingual student's struggle with written and oral communication. Parents often have difficulty assisting their children with the writing process when they are unfamiliar with the English language.

Frank (1995) revealed that many teachers are just learning about the process approach while others are more experienced in their teaching of writing. Teachers are at many different levels in their journeys of writing with students.

Teachers in grades 3, 5, and 8 are required to give standardized tests at the state level. Educators at these levels may have a tendency to place stronger emphasis on the writing process than teachers in other grade levels. Consequently students will struggle in this area.

A variety of factors contribute to students struggling academically. Home and school factors often prohibit children from excelling in writing. It is the educators' responsibility to break down these barriers to help students succeed.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Research revealed several possible solution strategies teachers could incorporate to enhance the development of writing. Some solutions available to teachers to improve organizational skills in writing are: creative writing, vocabulary development, portfolios, instructional approaches, and graphic organizers.

The first strategy is developing the creative writing process. Creative writing can be introduced through suggested writing activities such as haiku, acrostics, short stories, or letters (Stickeney, 1995). These techniques allow students to develop their writing skills without focusing on an essay format. It is essential to motivate students' writing and there are several helpful suggestions to get them started.

Tompkins (1992) identified several reasons why teachers should encourage story writing. One suggestion is to entertain and capture the imagination of the audience through the use of artistic expression. Another possibility is for students to discover the functions and values of writing, while

developing an ability to master reading and writing skills. Many educators, with a lack of training in creative writing, feel uneasy implementing these strategies.

Essex (1996) reported that teachers should encourage students to express themselves through creative writing. A beneficial type of creative writing is journaling. Journaling allows students to play with ideas and test them in a creative manner. Journals convey a writer's ability to reflect, imagine, and speculate (Hindley-Salch & Marino, 2000). This allows students to write in a free-flowing manner.

Behrman (1997) suggested that educators should emphasize the pleasures of writing. Students learn to look at writing activities as exciting challenges rather than dull tasks. Teachers should encourage enjoyable and intriguing writing from their students, and they must emphasize the importance of effective written communication.

The second strategy to improve organizational skills in writing is vocabulary development. At an early age it is crucial that students develop a wide variety of ways to express themselves. If students are exposed to different types of words they are more likely to develop an enriched vocabulary. The depth of students' vocabulary can have an impact upon accuracy, description, and quality of their writing (Brynildssen, 2000).

Words are the writer's most significant instrument, and vocabulary development must be an ongoing process. Laflamme (1997) offered several key components that facilitate development and implementation of an extensive

vocabulary program. Teachers and students must realize that vocabulary development is a long-term goal. In order to accomplish this goal, teachers must provide direct teaching or techniques that lead to an expanded vocabulary. New terms must have a connection to students' prior knowledge or experiences in order for students to relate words to everyday life. Students must understand that practice and repetition are essential methods used to understand vocabulary. Teachers should exercise enthusiasm when introducing new words.

The ability to expand students' vocabulary is an everyday procedure. Teaching strategies should be altered to fit students' skill levels and learning styles. A well-rounded educator should present new words weekly, encourage students to keep a personal vocabulary dictionary, and continue to incorporate new words to daily activities (Lee & Miller, 2000).

The third strategy to improve organizational skills is the use of portfolios. Portfolios are systematic, organized collections of work used by the teacher and the student to monitor the progress of a student's knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward writing (Vavrus, 1990). Teachers need to determine the objective for a portfolio. Once the main focus has been conveyed, students are then responsible for organizing the contents of their work. These contents may vary based on the focus of the portfolio.

Johnson and Rose (1997) listed several components which can be included in a portfolio. A portfolio may include a creative cover, a letter to the reader, a table of contents, several student artifacts, reflections, and a self-

evaluation. Reflections on artifacts engage students in on-going goal setting and the development of interpersonal skills. Goal setting and self-evaluation are key elements to continue growth within students' work. To self-evaluate means to monitor one's own work habits and thinking skills (Burke, Fogarty, & Belgrad, 1994). Along with the advantage of keeping a running record of a student's progress in writing, portfolios also allow an opportunity for teachers to conference with their students.

Calkins-McCormick and Harwayne (1991) acknowledged many focal points to reflect upon on while conducting a successful portfolio conference. Together they created the following questions:

1. Did you use your time wisely?
2. What did you accomplish as a writer?
3. Did you observe progress in your writing?
4. Were any changes on grammar and punctuation required?
5. What are you learning about yourself as a writer?
6. What are the hardest and easiest components of writing for you?
7. Did you accomplish your writing goal? (p. 255-256)

Work included in a portfolio should contain some artifacts selected by the teacher and student. Overall contents to be evaluated should reflect some sample works in progress as well as finished products. Portfolio evaluation is, essentially, an ongoing process containing reflective comments rather than a final grade (Forte & Schurr, 1995).

The fourth strategy is the use of diverse instructional approaches. Writing habits can vary drastically based upon instruction provided by the teacher. Some educators introduce new methods while others continue using the traditional method. The traditional method emphasizes proper usage of grammar, spelling, and mechanics while writing narrative, persuasive, and expository essays. This five step approach includes prewriting, drafting, revising, publishing, and sharing (Smith, 2000). This structured approach usually does not provide an opportunity for creativity to flow. This method would be more beneficial if teachers expanded on these five steps by including students' thoughts and experiences. Due to the lack of teacher training, some educators are still using only the traditional approach, while others have been trained in new strategies.

The lack of consistency among these approaches can be a disservice for students as they move from one teacher to the next. This transition requires an adjustment to new methods of teaching. Students often struggle with using their prior knowledge on writing with new teaching strategies as they progress to the next grade level. These thoughts have been derived from observations of students' writing behaviors (Five & Dionisio, 1999b).

Other researchers disagree with this idea and feel it only takes one good teacher to create an efficient writer (Calkins-McCormick & Harwayne, 1991). Some of the new techniques used to develop effective writers are: the holistic approach, mini-lessons, and computer assisted writing instruction.

Cowell and Butler (1985) introduced the holistic approach as an evaluation process used to assess writing as a whole. Spelling, grammatical usage, and construction are not the key components needed to analyze an individual's writing. The key focus should be placed on the student's ability to state a main idea and follow up with details.

Robb (1999) stated that mini-lessons provide a captivating way to embrace students' inner side of writing. Lessons with short descriptions demonstrate important components for students to use for quick reference while revising their writing. They are considered warm-up activities to improve style and content.

Computer-assisted writing instruction provides many intriguing ways to support writing. Computer software guides the student writer through the identification topic, brainstorming and organizing, and the application of the resulting outline to produce a written document. Strickland (1987) conducted a case study using such a program and found it effective. Furthermore, the Internet can be utilized as a tool to promote collaboration among students in other classrooms around the world (Five & Dionisio, 1999a). The Internet gives students an opportunity to share their pieces of work and witness other accounts of writing styles among their peers. The students can also use online versions of a dictionary, thesaurus, or an encyclopedia to improve their document.
The Internet can benefit teachers by offering many excellent print and electronic materials to help teachers apply the Internet materials into their lessons.

Teachers can also obtain information about educational applications by visiting the websites of other schools.

The fifth strategy to improve organizational skills is using graphic organizers. According to Burke et al. (1999), graphic organizers are mental maps which indicate skills such as sequencing, comparing, contrasting, and classifying to engage students in active learning. Some examples of graphic organizers are webs, maps, diagrams, and grids. Venn diagrams, brainstorming webs, and editing checklists have also been helpful to educators and students.

Graphic organizers provide tools for assisting teachers and students to graphically display their thinking processes. McTighe and Lyman (1992) suggested that organizers display complex information in a concrete form, identifying relationships between facts and concepts, generating and categorizing ideas for writing, and connecting new information to prior knowledge while evaluating student thinking and learning.

In order to keep ideas in sequential order, graphic organizers can be utilized as tools that can guide students through the five stages of writing. The five stages of writing are prewriting, drafting, revising, publishing, and sharing. Meyer (1995) using data derived from a 13-week study involving two third grade classes from New Jersey, indicated that graphic organizers helped students show improvement in their writing.

Graphic organizers are visual tools, which are becoming key components of teaching, learning, and assessing (Hyerle, 1996). Students may be overwhelmed with the variety of information given, and organizers allow them to cover each component. This will help students complete all areas of a structured essay.

In reference to these various writing strategies, the following interventions were incorporated into the action plan. The interventions involved various writing lessons, selected graphic organizers, and assessment tools.

Project Objective and Processes

As a result of increased instructional emphasis on using graphic organizers during the period of January 2002 through May 2002, the elementary school students from the targeted classes will increase their ability to develop organizational skills in writing as measured by anecdotal records, observation checklists, surveys, and assessments.

The processes necessary to achieve the project objective are:

1. Develop a series of lesson plans using writing activities.
2. Incorporate graphic organizers focusing on narrative, persuasive, and expository writing.
3. Create assessment instruments to measure changes in student writing.

Project Action Plan

The action plan will be conducted for a total of 16 weeks. Throughout the research will focus on persuasive, expository, and narrative essays. Students will

learn how to effectively use graphic organizers and write a coherent essay. Rubrics will be used to grade essays. Observation will take place through the use of checklists, journaling, and anecdotal records. Conferencing will be conducted after each individual student essay has been completed.

Week 1

- Student survey
- Parent survey
- Teacher survey
- Unstructured persuasive essay
- Observation

Week 2

- Introduce transition words
- Introduce adjectives to enhance work
- Introduce format - paragraphs and indenting
- Introduce the persuasive format

Week 3

- Presentation of graphic organizers
- Group persuasive essay using a graphic organizer

Week 4

- Introduce rubrics
- Individual graphic organizer for a persuasive essay

Week 5

Individual structured persuasive essay

Teacher observation checklist

Anecdotal records

Week 6

Teachers grade essays with rubric

Begin conferencing

Week 7

Continue conferencing

Anecdotal records

Week 8

Introduce the expository essay format

Group graphic organizer on an expository essay

Week 9

Group expository essay using a graphic organizer

Week 10

Individual structured expository essay

Teacher observation checklist

Anecdotal records

Week 11

Students grade their own paper using a rubric

Anecdotal records

Week 12

Introduce narrative format

Group graphic organizer on a narrative essay

Time order phrases

Week 13

Group narrative essay using a graphic organizer

Week 14

Individual structured narrative essay

Teacher observation checklist

Anecdotal records

Week 15

Peer editing of narrative essay using rubric

Conferencing

Week 16

Conferencing

Posttest – 40 minute structured individual persuasive essay

Student survey

Methods of Assessment

The objective will be assessed through the use of anecdotal records, observation checklists, surveys, and assessments. Anecdotal records will be used by the teacher during conference time and while students are engaged in

individualized writing. The teacher will focus on the students' ability to express their ideas clearly, use sequential tactics, and correct mechanics through an observation checklist. Surveys have been created to assess the ideas of students, teachers, and parents on writing. Student surveys will be used as a pretest and posttest. Rubrics will be used to evaluate narrative, persuasive, and expository essays written by the students.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of Intervention

The objective of this project was to increase students' ability to develop organizational skills in writing through the use of graphic organizers. To achieve the project objective various strategies were put into effect. A series of writing activities were developed, a variety of graphic organizers were utilized during essay writing, and assessment tools were created.

A series of writing activities were designed to enhance writing. Narrative, expository, and persuasive techniques were each emphasized for a five-week period. During this time, three different types of learning styles were facilitated. Each essay format began with a whole group discussion on the components needed for a well-developed essay. Ideas were brainstormed on an overhead and compiled into a class essay. The second style required the children to work in heterogeneous groups of two. Peers worked together to create an essay based upon the requirements listed in the whole class discussion. A third style was to lead students into creating their own individual essay based on acquired knowledge. Throughout each five-week period, mini-lessons were provided to

enhance students' writing. These consisted of adjectives, transition words, attention grabbers, and time-order phrases.

A variety of graphic organizers were utilized during essay writing. Implementation of graphic organizers began with an overall introduction and group discussion. Each type of writing required the use of a different organizer. Persuasive organizers required students to take a position and list reasons for their thoughts. Expository organizers emphasized a structure format with facts and elaboration. Narrative organizers focused on sequencing events and reactions. These graphic organizers allowed students to brainstorm in a whole group and individual setting.

Several assessment instruments were designed to evaluate the impact of these lesson plans. They consisted of teacher observation checklists, surveys, anecdotal records, and rubrics.

A teacher observation checklist was helpful in checking to make sure students presented each component of the paper (Appendix A). This indicated the range of growth over the course of the action plan focusing on strengths and weaknesses in students' writing ability. These observation checklists were used during the three-scheduled conference times conducted between teacher and individual students.

Surveys were given to parents, teachers, and students to gather their thoughts and feelings on the writing process (Appendixes B, C, D).

These student surveys were the main focus emphasizing the students' perspectives before and after the plan went into effect.

Anecdotal records were also used to note strengths and weaknesses of individual students throughout the action plan. Detailed records were essential to reflect on individual students; however this entailed a great deal of paperwork. At the beginning of the plan records were kept in a journal. This means of record keeping was unorganized and made finding trends and patterns difficult. In search of more effective techniques, a PMI chart was used to monitor individual student progress. This chart reflected on the pluses, minuses, and interesting facts observed on a weekly basis.

Rubrics were also used as guideline tools for writing expectations in the classroom (Appendixes E, F, G). Children were given an opportunity to follow these guidelines to construct well-written essays. Expectations were clearly defined and stated allowing teachers to use the rubrics while evaluating essays. Rubrics were also incorporated during peer editing to help students become familiar with expectations and grading styles. The rubrics were initially constructed for the teacher, but as the plan was altered, the students also utilized this form.

The first aspect of testing involved observing the results from the assessment tools as part of the pretest and posttest. The second aspect of the testing involved individual unstructured essays to be completed prior to the action plan. The same prompt was given in a structured format at the end of the

sixteen-week plan.

Three weeks into the action plan some deviations were required. The original plan was to begin with the whole class introduction of essay types followed by individual essay writing. However, the educators realized the need for a stepping-stone between these two styles. Students were placed in heterogeneous pairs to complete an essay after the whole class writing presentation.

The original schedule accommodated a sixteen-week action plan. Towards the end of the project the need for sixteen weeks decreased to fifteen weeks. This was possible because extra writing preparation time was allotted during two weeks of standardized test preparation.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Anecdotal records were used as a form of reflection to emphasize trends and patterns among students. This was an important aspect to visualize areas of difficulty for students. Three outstanding trends and patterns caused educators to be concerned during note taking.

The first concern dealt with the lack of parental support, which began as early as the first week when the parent survey was distributed. A low amount of involvement and a lack of interest in writing was evident from the few responses returned. Parents were initially interested when the idea was presented during parent-teacher conferences. However, within weeks the support diminished and

only 37 out of 70 surveys were returned to school. Those replies which did come back revealed that parents did not find enjoyment in writing nor did they encourage their children to take an active part in expressing themselves through writing. This carried over into the classroom and parents remained consistent with little or no help in the project.

The second concern revolved around poor use of grammar and punctuation. Students seemed unwilling to change their previously developed habits. Students struggled with differentiating between past and present tenses. Spelling and punctuation also presented difficulty. More emphasis needed to be placed on these areas.

The third concern focused on the overwhelming effect graphic organizers had on students. The structure and need for explanation caused students to feel frustrated and confused. This was mainly in the area of taking the information from the graphic organizer and displaying it in paragraph form. The ideas and examples did not flow in a coherent manner. Through time and practice students became more comfortable with this process.

Surveys were used to record parent, teacher, and student input on writing exercises and habits. This was a useful way to gather information prior to the action plan.

Parent surveys were conducted during the third week. Each family was given a form with eight questions ranging from their perspective on writing to their child's interest. One relationship represented in the results was that parents with

a minimal interest in writing often had children with low regard for the subject. Even though parents were not engaged in writing at home, they did encourage students to participate in activities. Parents pointed out that so much had changed in the area of writing that they often did not feel comfortable assisting students with assignments. They became reluctant to lend a helping hand. This caused the researchers to continually reassure students of practices so that they were confident when working at home.

Teacher surveys focused on individual reflection of the way writing was presented in their classrooms. The majority of facilitators believed that they were adequately trained and were able to assist students in writing assignments. However, many teachers indicated an interest in attending another workshop to sharpen writing skills and reinforce teaching strategies.

Standardized testing has required teachers to emphasize writing skills on a daily basis. Requirements are very specific and leave little room for creativity.

Student surveys were given at the beginning and at the end of the project. The first survey was used as a tool to determine prior knowledge of students' writing habits. The post survey was administered to see if writing habits improved during the fifteen-week period. Table 6 exhibits these findings.

Table 6

Percentage of Student Responses on the Writing Survey and Postsurvey.

Question	Pretest	Posttest
Enjoy Writing	68	59
Choice of Topic	85	86
Writing Partner	46	63
Share Writing In Class	40	41
Writing Difficulty	60	70
Comprehension Of Graphic Organizers	13	84
Graphic Organizers Are Helpful	18	72
Proofread Writing	18	46

n = 65

Table 6 compares the pretest and posttest results from the student writing survey. The percentage of students who found writing difficult rose from 60% to 70%. It appears that children were overwhelmed with the detailed writing lessons given on a weekly basis. Teachers often have more flexibility in planning lessons when they are not following a detailed action plan. The data also revealed that student comprehension of graphic organizers rose from 13% to 84%. This may be due to consistent use of graphic organizers while writing. Overall, 72% of students found graphic organizers helpful.

Observation checklists were used by the teacher to record the students' writing samples for appropriate content, organization, and correct usage. Students were required to have clearly stated topics and fully developed ideas. Student work was required to be sequenced effectively and organized in a smooth flowing manner. Teachers emphasized the use of correct punctuation, capitalization, and grammar. Assignments were graded as mastered, developing, or needs reinforcement in each category.

Checklists were used during conferencing between the teacher and the students. It was observed that the content of much of the student writing was at the developing level. When the action plan began students needed reinforcement, but many improved as the plan proceeded. Organization of thoughts appeared to cause some students difficulty, but the use of graphic organizers helped to focus students in the right direction. However, students needed to improve the usage of mechanics on a daily basis.

A writing posttest was administered during the third week of May to evaluate the same skills that the pretest administered in January. Identical prompts were used for assessment. The persuasive prompt was, "Do you think that children your age should go to bed at a certain time on school nights or only when they are tired?" A rubric with four criteria was used to assess the essays. This first measured the students' ability to stay focused and provide main ideas. The second criterion dealt with students' capability for providing support and elaboration of the main idea. The third criterion focused on properly organizing

information into a paragraph form. The fourth criterion reflected on grammar usage, punctuation, and spelling. Variations of rubrics were used based upon the particular objectives at each grade level. However, the scale remained consistent throughout all three grade levels. Students were rated as fully developed if all components were present. Those who were adequately developed needed to continue focusing on strengthening areas of weakness. If students were struggling, but provided basic thoughts, they were placed into the developing category. These students were heading in the right direction, but they were lacking necessities for a well-organized essay. Students with little evidence of a topic or organization received an absent rating. Letter grades and percentages were provided for teacher and student reference.

In order to assess the students' writing process, a rubric was used throughout the intervention. These data were compiled through percentages in each criterion and are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Percent of Responses on the Pretest and Posttest Writing Rubrics.

Rubric Criteria	Pretest	Posttest
Focus	80	95
Support	70	80
Organization	68	84
Grammar	63	72

n = 65

The intervention appears to have had a positive effect based on the criteria. The students' ability to focus on the main idea changed from 80% to 95%. Support also changed from 70% to 80%. Organization showed the greatest increase from 68% to 84%. Grammar and usage changed from 63% to 72%, but was still considered deficient. It was observed that graphic organizers played a major role in student achievement in the areas of focus, support, and organization. Grammar, usage, and spelling were not the main focal points of research, and this was evident in the results.

Anecdotal records became more useful as graphic organizers were implemented. As a result of this use, records became structured and more beneficial while looking for trends and patterns. It was apparent that more emphasis needed to be placed on grammatical areas and creativity.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on the use of graphic organizers, many students showed improvement in the use of organizational skills during the writing process. The main focus of the project was to work on organizational skills to increase students' academic growth. It was observed that the main area of concern was in essay writing. The implementation helped to recognize positive and negative aspects in relation to lesson plans, graphic organizers, and assessments incorporated into the classroom.

A series of lesson plans were developed to assist students in the writing process. These lesson plans particularly focused on the three types of essays,

but became overwhelming to the students. The time frame seemed long and tedious with little opportunity for expansion and creativity. Providing the basics was essential and effective, but could have been accomplished in a shorter time frame.

The overall consensus of teachers was that attitudes towards student writing were positive, but students' writing habits were average to low. Graphic organizers were strongly encouraged to help with this weakness; however many did not use this helpful tool during instruction.

The use of graphic organizers allowed students to organize their thoughts, clarify ideas, and construct well-written essays. The teachers noted that the children had the ability to transfer this skill into other areas. Students had the knowledge needed to incorporate organizers into other activities using their comprehension and study skills. This tool gave visual thinkers the opportunity to create written documents.

Beyond these interventions the following recommendations are suggested. Major concerns were found with insufficient grammar and usage, lack of creative interpretation, and poor editing skills.

First, the emphasis was on organizational skills, which led to neglecting the focus on grammar and usage. A healthy balance needs to be incorporated when teaching the elements of a well-written essay.

Second, the requirements became so specific and repetitious that students were left with little time for creativity. Their imaginations were not being

utilized to the full extent. One suggestion is to begin the writing process with weekly journaling to spark student interest.

Third, it was observed that editing is not an enjoyable activity for second, third, and fifth grade students. Ideally, the children need a variety of rubrics to evaluate and correct their work. This can be done individually or in a group setting to help with an awareness of requirements.

In conclusion, the teachers observed that the interventions and strategies were beneficial, and positive results in students' organizational skills were recognized. Graphic organizers lent assistance to provide students with a foundation to organize their materials and present their thoughts in a flowing sequence. The most successful intervention in the action plan was implementing graphic organizers. The least successful intervention was the use of peer editing because students easily became frustrated and confused with the task at hand. More teachers need to realize the benefits of graphic organizers and incorporate them into lessons across the curriculum.

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Appendix A
Writing Observation Checklist

WRITING OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Student: _____ Date: _____

	Mastered	Developing	Needs Reinforcement
CONTENT:			
Clear topic	____	____	____
Ideas fully developed	____	____	____
ORGANIZATION:			
Smooth flowing story	____	____	____
Sequenced effectively	____	____	____
MECHANICS:			
Punctuation/Capitalization	____	____	____
Grammar	____	____	____

Appendix B
Parent Writing Interest Survey

Parent Writing Interest Survey

For each item circle your response:

	Always	Sometimes	Never
1. Do you enjoy writing letters, stories, or poems?	3	2	1
2. Does your child see you writing at home?	3	2	1
3. Do you encourage your child to write?	3	2	1
4. Are writing materials available in the home?	3	2	1
5. Does your child enjoy writing letters, stories, or poems?	3	2	1
6. Does your child keep a daily journal or diary?	3	2	1
7. Do you discuss your child's writing with him/her?	3	2	1
8. Do you feel comfortable assisting your child with their writing?	3	2	1

Appendix C
Teacher Writing Survey

TEACHER WRITING SURVEY

Please check all items that apply to you.

1. What is your gender? Male_____ Female_____

2. What is your highest level of education?
   Bachelors_____ Masters_____ Doctorate_____

3. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
   1-4 years_____ 5-10 years_____
   11-20 years_____ over 20 years_____

4. What grade level do you teach?
   K-2_____ 3-5_____ 6-8_____

5. Do you feel you are trained to effectively teach writing?
   Yes____ No____

6. Have you attended a writing class or workshop?
   Yes____ No____

7. How important is writing in your classroom?
   Very important____ Somewhat____
   Not important____

8. Do you use writing across the curriculum?
   Yes____ No____

9. How often do you include writing activities in your lesson plans?
   Daily_____ 2-3 times a week _____ Once a week_____

10. How would you describe the attitudes of your students toward writing?

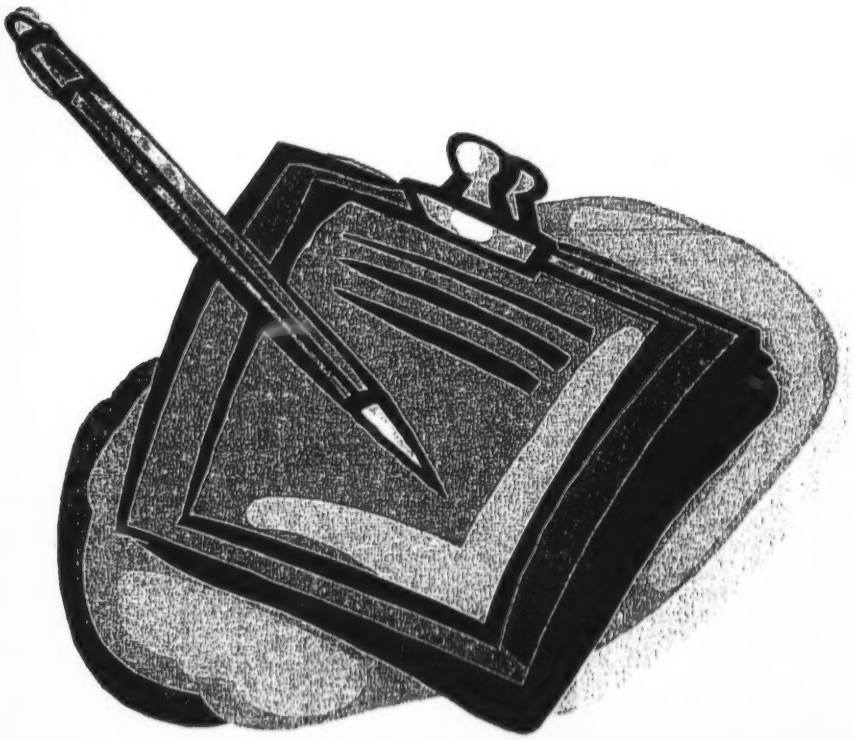
    Positive_____ Negative_____

11. How would you describe the writing habits of your students?

    High_____ Average_____ Low_____

12. Do you use graphic organizers in writing assignments?

    Always_____ Sometimes_____ Never_____



Appendix D
Student Writing Survey

Name: _____ Date: _____

Student Writing Survey

1. I like to write.

yes not sure no

2. I like to write in journals and/or diaries.

yes not sure no

3. I like to choose what I write about.

yes not sure no

4. I like to have a writing partner.

yes not sure no

5. I like to share what I write with the class.

yes not sure no

6. I find writing difficult.

yes not sure no

7. I know what a graphic organizer is.

yes not sure no

8. Graphic organizers are helpful to me.

yes not sure no

9. I like to write at home.

yes not sure no

10. I edit my writing.

yes not sure no

Appendix E
Second Grade Writing Rubric

Project: Writing a Paragraph Grade Level: 2
Goal/Standard:

Benchmark:					
Scale / Criteria	1 Absent	2 Developing	3 Adequately Developed	4 Fully Developed	Score
Focus - Main Idea	No Topic	Topic Unclear	Contains Some Details	Contains Full Message With Details	
Organization-Paragraph Form	No Plan	2 to 3 Complete Sentences	3 to 4 Complete Sentences	Complete Paragraph Form	
Capitals and Punctuation	No Capitals or Punctuation	1 or 2 Punctuated Sentences	3 or 4 Punctuated Sentences	Complete Sentences	
Spelling	Major Errors	More Than 4 Errors	Less Than 4 Errors	Correctly Spelled	

Comments: Total Score_____

Scale:						
16 = 100%	13 = 82%	10 = 64%	7 = 46%	4 = 28%	1= 10%
15 = 94%	12 = 76%	9 = 58%	6 = 40%	3 = 22%	0 = 0%
14 = 88%	11 = 70%	8 = 52%	5 = 34%	2 = 16%	

A = 100 - 93, B = 92 - 86, C = 85 - 78, D = 77-70, F = 69 or lower

Appendix F
Third Grade Writing Rubric

Project: Writing an Essay Grade Level: 3
Goal/Standard:

Benchmark:					
Scale / Criteria	1 Absent	2 Developing	3 Adequately Developed	4 Fully Developed	Score
Focus - Main Idea/ Theme	No Topic	Topic Unclear	Contains Some Details	Contains Full Message	
Support	No Support	Attempted Examples but not Related	Most Points Elaborated	All Major Points Elaborated	
Organization- Paragraph Form	No Plan	1 to 2 Paragraphs	3 to 4 Paragraphs	Complete Plan	
Grammar Usage- Punctuation And Spelling	Major Errors	7 or More Errors	Less Than 7 Errors	No Major Errors	

Comments: Total Score_____

Scale:						
16 = 100%	13 = 82%	10 = 64%	7 = 46%	4 = 28%	1= 10%
15 = 94%	12 = 76%	9 = 58%	6 = 40%	3 = 22%	0 = 0%
14 = 88%	11 = 70%	8 = 52%	5 = 34%	2 = 16%	

A = 100 - 93, B = 92 - 86, C = 85 - 78, D = 77-70, F = 69 or lower

Appendix G
Fifth Grade Writing Rubric

Project: Writing an Essay Grade Level: 5
Goal/Standard:

Benchmark:

Scale / Criteria	1 Absent	2 Developing	3 Adequately Developed	4 Fully Developed	Score
Focus - Main Idea/ Theme	No Topic	Topic Unclear	Contains Some Details	Contains Full Message	
Support	No Support	Attempted Examples but not Related	Most Points Elaborated	All Major Points Elaborated	
Organization- Paragraph Form	No Plan	1 to 3 Paragraphs	4 Paragraphs	Complete Plan	
Grammar Usage- Punctuation And Spelling	Major Errors	5 or More Errors	Less Than 5 Errors	No Major Errors	

Comments: Total Score_____

Scale:						
16 = 100%	13 = 82%	10 = 64%	7 = 46%	4 = 28%	1= 10%	
15 = 94%	12 = 76%	9 = 58%	6 = 40%	3 = 22%	0 = 0%	
14 = 88%	11 = 70%	8 = 52%	5 = 34%	2 = 16%		

A = 100 - 93, B = 92 - 86, C = 85 - 78, D = 77-70, F = 69 or lower

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